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STATE OF WISCONSIN
BEFORE THE SOCIAL WORKER SECTION
EXAMINING BOARD OF SOCIAL WORKERS,
MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPISTS AND PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS

IN THE MATTER OF THE DISCIPLINARY :

PROCEEDINGS AGAINST :

Case No. LS9903231SOC

VERONICA SUE HANSEN, C.S.W.,
RESPONDENT.

FINAL DECISION AND ORDER

The parties to this action for the purposes of Wis. Stats. §227.53 are:

*Veronica Sue Hansen, C.S.W.
601 Melanie Lane, Apt. 8
Ripon, WI 54971*

*Social Worker Section
Wisconsin Examining Board of Social Workers,
Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors
P.O. Box 8935
Madison, WI 53708-8935*

*Department of Regulation and Licensing
Division of Enforcement
P.O. Box 8935
Madison, WI 53708-8935*

The parties in this matter agree to the terms and conditions of the attached Stipulation as the final decision in this matter, subject to the approval of the Social Worker Section. The Section has reviewed this Stipulation and considers it acceptable.

Accordingly, the Section in this matter adopts the attached Stipulation and makes the following:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Veronica Sue Hansen, C.S.W., Respondent, date of birth May 23, 1966, is certified by the Social Worker Section as a social worker in the state of Wisconsin pursuant to certificate number 4291, which was first granted December 14, 1994.

2. Respondent received a bachelor of science degree in social work from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh on June 3, 1989.

3. Respondent was granted certification pursuant to the grandparenting provisions of 1991 Wisconsin Act 160, § 21(2)(a)1, based upon her having a bachelor's degree and having been engaged in the practice of social work for a minimum of 400 hours in a one year period prior to May 1, 1993. For this reason, Respondent did not take the examination otherwise required for certification.

4. Respondent's last address reported to the Department of Regulation and Licensing is 601 Melanie Lane, Apt. 8, Ripon, WI 54971.

5. From October 1997 until December 23, 1998, Respondent was employed as a social worker by the State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections at the Dodge Correctional Institution (DCI) in Waupun, Wisconsin.

6. As a part of her employment, Respondent served as Coordinator of the SMART recovery program. The SMART group had it's first meeting on March 31, 1998 and met on a weekly basis. Respondent's duties as Coordinator included providing 1:1 counseling on an informal basis if an inmate in the SMART group requested it.

7. During that same time, Inmate A was incarcerated at DCI, where Respondent was employed as a social worker. Inmate A was not on Respondent's caseload but was a member of the SMART group.

8. Department of Corrections policy and work rule prohibit employee's fraternization with inmates. The purpose of the policy and rule is to provide security for inmates and staff at the institutions. Respondent was aware of the policy and work rule.

9. Respondent acknowledges that while Inmate A was incarcerated, he expressed an interest in having a personal relationship with Respondent. Respondent also acknowledges that she continued to pursue a personal relationship with Inmate A after being specifically instructed not to by her supervisor.

10. While Respondent was still employed as a social worker at DCI, and while Inmate A was incarcerated there, the following occurred:

a. In mid-July 1998, Inmate A requested a 1:1 with Respondent. Respondent met with Inmate A approximately 3-4 times that month and addressed concerns Inmate A had about the food service at DCI. Respondent shared Inmate A's concerns with Inmate A's assigned social worker.

b. After a SMART group meeting on or about September 15, 1998, Inmate A handed Respondent some papers and said they were his homework. The papers included some poetry which was directed at Respondent as well as some personal thoughts and words to a love song.

c. After Respondent read the papers from Inmate A, she felt guilty as if she had done something to encourage this behavior but could not think of what she had done. Respondent subsequently tore the papers up. The following weekend, not knowing how to handle the situation, Respondent told her husband about the papers. Respondent's husband was angry and went to talk to a chaplain at DCI about Inmate A.

d. The chaplain then approached Respondent with the information he had learned from Respondent's husband, and together, the chaplain and Respondent went to talk to Respondent's supervisor, who is the treatment director at DCI.

e. Respondent was interviewed by her supervisor about her contacts with Inmate A. During the discussion, Respondent was informed of the crimes for which Inmate A had been incarcerated. Respondent's supervisor talked at length to Respondent about the importance of keeping a professional distance from inmates.

f. Respondent was instructed to have limited contact with Inmate A. If Inmate A requested materials relevant to the SMART group, Respondent could supply him with that information but should do so through Inmate A's social worker.

g. On September 30, 1998, Respondent's supervisor removed Inmate A from the SMART group. Respondent's supervisor also met with Inmate A and gave him a direct order to have no further inappropriate contact with Respondent.

h. Following a couple of weeks with no contact with Inmate A, Respondent recognized that she was feeling flattered by the attention Inmate A had given her and felt sad that Inmate A had been removed from the SMART group.

- i. During a meeting with Inmate B, Respondent asked Inmate B how Inmate A was doing. Respondent knew that Inmate B and Inmate A were good friends and that they worked together. Inmate B told Respondent that Inmate A was upset about losing his SMART group membership. Inmate B also told Respondent that, if Respondent wanted to maintain a friendship with Inmate A, she would need to get a post office box. Inmate B told Respondent that he would give the information about this to Inmate A. Respondent said she would think about it.
- j. Following her meeting with Inmate B, Respondent went to talk to Inmate A on the unit about her getting a post office box in Oshkosh. Inmate A instructed Respondent to use the alias "Cherrie Ramker" in her correspondence to him. During this conversation, Respondent openly acknowledged her interest in Inmate A as a friend and potentially more.
- k. Shortly after her conversation with Inmate A, Respondent rented a post office box in Oshkosh. Respondent provided Inmate B with the information about the box number and Inmate B provided the information to Inmate A.
- l. Over the next week or so, Respondent felt guilty about what she was doing and told Inmate B to tell Inmate A that she was going to close the post office box, which she did. Respondent received no mail from Inmate A at this post office box.
- m. Approximately one week later, Respondent ran into Inmate A in a hallway. Inmate A asked Respondent why she was mad at him. Inmate A had also written to Respondent via the DCI mail system telling Respondent how upset he was that she closed the post office box.
- n. Later that same afternoon, Respondent went to the unit where Inmate A resides and they talked for a long time about their feelings for each other. Respondent agreed to open another post office box and did so that same week. Upon leaving the unit, Inmate A asked Respondent for a hug and Respondent allowed Inmate A to hug her.
- o. A few days later, while Inmate B was meeting with Respondent in Respondent's office, Inmate B told Respondent that Inmate A had admitted to him that Inmate A was planning on using Respondent and that Inmate A had plans to get himself thrown into observation to make Respondent feel sorry for him and to intensify her feelings for him.
- p. Respondent was upset and scared, and closed the second post office box. Respondent received one letter from Inmate A at this post office box.
- q. Respondent continued to think about Inmate A and, after a short time with no contact with Inmate A, Respondent confronted Inmate A about his plans to use and manipulate her. Inmate A convinced Respondent that his feelings for her were sincere.
- r. On November 12, 1998, Respondent opened a third post office box and used it for correspondence to and from Inmate A. Respondent used the alias "Cherrie Ramker" in the correspondence, in order to deceive the staff at DCI.
- s. At this time, correspondence between Respondent and Inmate A became very personal and intimate. Respondent received three letters from Inmate A at this post office box. Respondent sent Inmate A several cards, letters and copies of e-mail, i.e. humor and poems, via DCI mail. In the letters to Inmate A, Respondent disclosed information regarding her personal life. The nature of the cards and letters indicated a romantic relationship between Respondent and Inmate A, including mention of physical contact, specifically hugging and kissing, having taken place.
- t. From November 12, 1998 to December 11, 1998, Respondent visited with Inmate A on the unit on approximately ten occasions.
- u. Respondent also had contact with Inmate A in her office on at least two occasions after normal work hours when no one else was around. These meetings were designed specifically to avoid other people being around.
- v. During this period, Respondent and Inmate A kissed and hugged a few times. There was no sexual contact.
- w. On December 11, 1998, Respondent sent a copied e-mail to Inmate A via DCI mail. An officer questioned and opened it, finding a personal note from Respondent to Inmate A. The officer took the note to the security director.

11. On December 14, 1998, Respondent was suspended from her social work employment, pending an investigation.

12. On December 17, 1998, an investigative meeting was held during which Respondent admitted to Department of Corrections staff that Respondent had engaged in the conduct set out in Finding of Fact 10, above.

13. On December 23, 1998, Respondent was terminated from her social work employment at the Department of Corrections because of violations of work rules.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The Social Worker Section of the Wisconsin Examining Board of Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to §457.26(2), Stats.

2. The Social Worker Section of the Wisconsin Examining Board of Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors has authority to enter into this stipulated resolution of this matter pursuant to §227.44(5), Stats.

3. Respondent's conduct, as set out above, constitutes failure to avoid a dual relationship, which is unprofessional conduct as defined by Wis. Adm. Code § SFC 20.02(13), and subjects Respondent to discipline pursuant to §457.26(2)(f), Stats.

4. Respondent's conduct, as set out above, constitutes gross negligence in practice, which is unprofessional conduct as defined by Wis. Adm. Code § SFC 20.02(22), and subjects Respondent to discipline pursuant to §457.26(2)(f), Stats.

ORDER

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED:

1. That the surrender by Veronica Sue Hansen of her certificate to practice as a social worker in the state of Wisconsin is hereby accepted, effective immediately.

2. That for two years from the date of this Order, Respondent shall not apply for any certification from the Social Worker Section of the Wisconsin Examining Board of Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors. That following two years from the date of this order, Respondent may petition the Social Worker Section of the Wisconsin Examining Board of Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors for certification to practice as a social worker in the state of Wisconsin or any other certification issued by the Section, under the following terms and conditions:

a. She shall be required to meet all requirements for that certification which are then required by statute and administrative rule, prior to being certified.

b. Respondent shall, at her own expense, have undergone an assessment by a mental health care provider experienced in assessing health care providers who have engaged in sexual misconduct with patients or clients.

c. The practitioner performing the assessment must have been approved by the Section, with an opportunity for the Division of Enforcement to make its recommendation, prior to the evaluation being performed.

d. Respondent must provide proof sufficient to the Section that Respondent can practice with reasonable skill and safety of clients and public.

e. If the Section determines to certify Respondent, Respondent's certificate shall be limited in a manner to address any recommendations resulting from the assessment, including, but not limited to:

i. Psychotherapy, at Respondent's expense, by a therapist approved by the Section, to address specific treatment goals, with periodic reports to the Section by the therapist.

ii. Additional professional education in any identified areas of deficiency.

iii. Restrictions on the nature of practice or practice setting or requirements for supervision of practice, by a professional approved by the Section, with periodic reports to the Section by the supervisor.

f. If certified, Respondent shall appear before the Section on an annual basis, if requested by the Section, to review the progress of any treatment and rehabilitation.

3. If Respondent believes that the Section's refusal to certify Respondent under paragraph 2 is inappropriate or that any limitation imposed or maintained by the Section under paragraph 2 is inappropriate, Respondent may seek a class 1 hearing pursuant to sec. 227.01(3)(a), Stats., in which the burden shall be on Respondent to

show that the Section's decision is arbitrary or capricious. The decision not to certify Respondent or to impose limitations on Respondent's certificate shall remain in effect until there is a final decision in Respondent's favor on the issue.

4. If Respondent is certified by the Section under paragraph 2, violation of any term or condition of this Order, or of any limitation imposed under paragraph 2 above, may constitute grounds for revocation of Respondent's certificate as a social worker in Wisconsin. Should the Section determine that there is probable cause to believe that Respondent has violated the terms of this Order, or any limitation imposed under paragraph 2 above, the Section may order that Respondent's certificate be summarily suspended pending investigation of and hearing on the alleged violation.

The rights of a party aggrieved by this Decision to petition the Section for rehearing and to petition for judicial review are set forth on the attached "Notice of Appeal Information".

Dated at Madison, Wisconsin this 23rd day of March, 1999.

Cornelia Gordon-Hempe

Chairperson

Social Worker Section

